



Legislative Testimony
Joint Committee on Appropriations
Governor's Proposed FY 2017-2018 Budget

Dear Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Maureen Sullivan Dinnan. I am the executive director of the Health Assistance interVention Education Network for Connecticut Health Professionals, also known as HAVEN. I thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony in opposition to that portion of the Governor's proposed budget which eliminates the professional assistance fund and redirects moneys intended for HAVEN to the General Fund.

Established by Public Act, HAVEN was created in 2007 following the passage of Connecticut General Statute Section 19a-12a. This legislation was the result of a multi-year collaborative effort by the Connecticut State Medical Society, the Connecticut State Nurses Association, the Connecticut State Dental Association, the Connecticut Veterinary Medicine Association and the Connecticut Academy of Physician Assistants. Their members were silently suffering the challenges of physical illness, mental illness, chemical dependence, or emotional disorder. The original legislative action balanced the important public policy to encourage our medical and health professionals to access care without fear of stigma and licensure discipline with the important need to have healthy accountable professionals providing care to others and so, enhancing the likelihood of patient safety.

In 2007, it was unclear what the demand for the program would be. By the end of 2009, HAVEN had supported approximately 300 professionals. By the end of 2016, HAVEN has supported over one thousand professionals. In 2016 alone, we worked with over 360 professionals. Our current active participants number is 263 which means 263 professionals have accepted the responsibility of a health and wellness contract or are in the process of evaluation for such a contract. They have committed to ongoing care and treatment with providers submitting quarterly reports attesting to the engagement in treatment; when they are practicing, they have identified a practice liaison, who also submits quarterly reports indicating whether they appear to be practicing with skill and safety. They submit random weekly random drug tests. They are meeting with HAVEN on a quarterly basis or more often as needed.

Also in 2016, 37 professionals successfully completed their health and wellness contracts. After comprehensive evaluation, there was insufficient basis to monitor 6 professionals and 8 professionals elected not to obtain a Connecticut license. One professional died. Consistent with the disease model, some professionals were not able to successfully work their health program or were not eligible for confidential participation due to a felony conviction, licensure discipline, or patient harm resulting in 32 referrals to the Department of Public Health as required by law. None of these numbers capture the inquiry calls HAVEN receives from professionals or family members of professionals seeking advice or direction to resources.

Numbers do not reflect the staff dedication and hours required to obtain medical records, find appropriate treatment facilities or providers, help the professional navigate insurance demands, health benefits, medical leave requirements, etc. These numbers do not reflect collaboration with Department of

Consumer Protection, the federal Drug Enforcement Agency, the Department of Children and Family Services, or Immigration and Naturalization. These numbers do not reflect advising participant on how to disclose their participation with HAVEN on a job interview, compliance letters to employers, and compliance and explanations to hospitals, credentialing, and certifying agencies.

These numbers do not reflect the hours to review more than ten thousand random drug tests per year. The time to call participants when they have not provided prescriptions to legitimately explain positive results. The time to call therapists and treaters when treatment plans are in question or the time dedicated to find a higher level of care, and then to meet with the Department of Public Health.

HAVEN is attempting to meet the ever-rising demand with inadequate staffing which includes an executive director, administrative assistant, receptionist, three quarter time social worker and bookkeeper, and invaluable volunteers, including a certified medical review officer, three physician directors, one psychiatric nurse director, and fifteen medical review committee members. As we told the appropriations committee in 2015 the program cannot be sustained on the generosity of volunteers and our limited staff cannot meet the demand. We are struggling.

Our current income is largely administrative fees charged to the participants in the program. These fees do not cover our expenses nor do the fees support the growth that is desperately needed. In addition, the participants, who are often refrained from practice for a period of time, struggle to pay the fees which may include our administrative fees, random drug testing fees, treatment/copay costs. As with other businesses, 7% do not pay or have extreme financial hardship. 33% are in payment plans. Many allied health professionals and licensed practical nurses are the sole supporters of their families, have modest income, and the financial struggle complicates their access to services. HAVEN currently does not turn away any qualifying person for financial reasons and makes every effort to work with the individual, despite our own limited resources.

We understand that the State of Connecticut faces financial challenges. For that reason, in 2015 we did not ask the state to redirect funds away from any department or project. As HAVEN was created as a peer support organization, peers again demonstrated their support for their colleagues. While no organization wanted a licensing fee increase, the professional membership organizations agreed to a licensing fee increase on condition that the \$ 5.00 increase would be directed to HAVEN. In order to meet this request, the legislature created a professional assistance account, required the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health to certify the amount of funds deposited into the account and then to transfer the funds to HAVEN. To date, no money has been transferred from the account to HAVEN.

Despite multiple efforts to coordinate a process for the transfer of funds, the Department of Public Health did not engage in any meaningful discussion until again the professional membership organizations stepped in and sought the intercession of the Attorney General. We are hoping that an agreement for the release of the funds will be reached soon. It is imperative that any agreement not be undermined by a change in the legislation as requested by the Governor.

In order to properly provide services, HAVEN needs a medical director, a psychiatric nurse, two full time additional social worker/case managers, and an additional administrative assistant. The money in the professional assistance account may not enable HAVEN to fill all these positions, but will enable HAVEN to continue in our mission. Without the funding, HAVEN will need to make the difficult decision to limit services, raise fees, or close. The cost to the State of Connecticut if HAVEN were to close far exceeds the amount of the \$ 5.00 licensing fee increase. The cost to the professionals and to patient safety is immeasurable.

HAVEN needs the full five dollars as set forth in the existing law. The sum should not be negotiated. The funds to be transferred should not be at the discretion of the Department of Public Health or the Governor. HAVEN is in desperate need.

Finally, we submit that the \$ 5.00 licensing fee increase should not be related to mandated reporting. HAVEN requested the funds to support our program prior to the expansion of mandated reporting. The Governor's proposal to repeal the mandated reporting of professionals who are suspected to be impaired to the Department of Public Health or HAVEN, eliminate the professional assistance account and redirect the money to the general fund implies that there is no need for HAVEN without mandated reporting. Yet, HAVEN has demonstrated increasing demand for services every year since 2007.

Most states have mandated reporting laws. Prior to 2015, Connecticut's mandated reporting laws were limited to physicians and physician assistants. It is beyond reason to consider that the State of Connecticut would now send the message that professionals who are at risk for impairment may make potentially life and death decisions regarding the wellness of the people of the State of Connecticut.

HAVEN would welcome the opportunity to provide more information.

I would like to again thank the Committee for allowing me to submit testimony on behalf of HAVEN, the health assistance program for Connecticut health professionals and in opposition to the Governor's budget.

We appreciate your consideration.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Maureen Sullivan Dinnan', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Maureen Sullivan Dinnan, J.D.
Executive Director